

TCRPC

Planning Toolkit Fact Sheet

Off-Street Parking Management



INTRODUCTION

Off-street parking requirements represent a major factor in virtually all community development decisions and projects. Too often, communities have adopted parking requirements based on outdated or flawed guidance that has made maximum peak demand the minimum allowed, which results in more space devoted to the storage of vehicles than to the employees, residents, patrons, or other people using the site. Recently, new thinking has emerged to re-examine the balance between the needs of the site and the community as whole, while also recognizing the potential negative impacts on transportation choices, environmental quality, and cost of development from an excessive supply of parking.

In most communities, parking is regulated within the municipal zoning ordinance, typically by establishing a minimum amount required based the kind and intensity of uses located on site. Ratios of parking space per some increment of floor area are the most common form of these requirements. These ratios are usually designed to accommodate the absolute peak demand, turning “maximum possible” into “minimum required”. This practice has resulted in commercial corridors dominated by under-utilized surface parking lots that are not only financially unproductive, but also inconsistent with local environmental and community development goals.

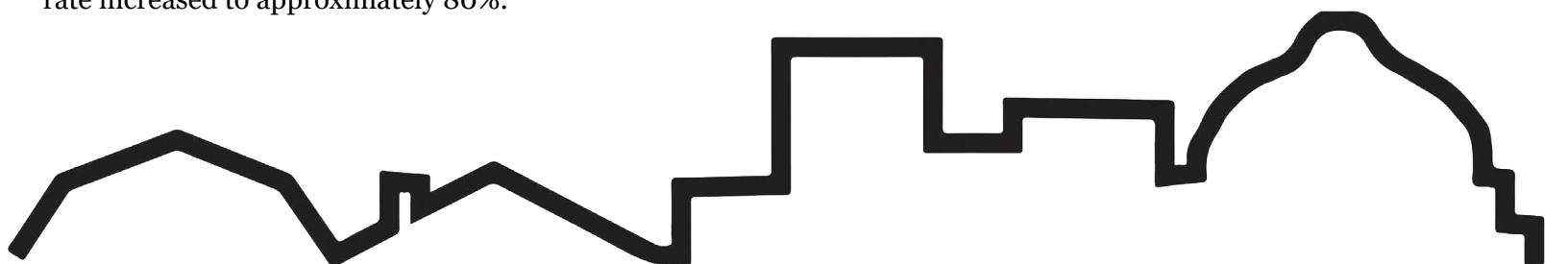
In 2017 and 2018, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) undertook a study to examine parking usage in Susquehanna Township, Dauphin County. Using aerial photography captured via drone, data on parking lot usage was gathered at various businesses on multiple days (including Black Friday 2017 & 2018). The study showed consistently under-utilized parking, with typical parking space occupancy of approximately 45% for large commercial shopping centers or offices and approximately 33% for fast food restaurants. Even on the peak parking demand days of Black Friday, commercial shopping centers’ occupancy rate increased to approximately 80%.

Based on the data collected in the study, TCRPC staff has developed guidance for communities seeking to re-examine their off-street parking requirements. Following this guidance would bring community parking requirements in line with our region’s actual parking usage and demand. Adopting maximum parking standards frees developers and site owners of the burden of building and maintaining the excessive amount of parking we’ve spent decades building. Less unproductive surface parking lots means more opportunities for denser, more walkable/bikeable/transit-friendly development that increases both transportation choices and the property’s financial productivity.

There are multiple options for addressing parking standards within a community. Some, like the City of Harrisburg, have abolished parking requirements from certain zoning districts. Others have eliminated off-street parking requirements altogether. Some have used a mixed approach in which minimum parking standards are lowered and/or paired with maximum parking standards. Other options, including shared parking provisions or “bonuses” that allow additional parking to be built in exchange for other improvements, like green infrastructure, are also available.

BENEFITS

- More efficient land-use patterns and opportunity for development within a community
- Increases transportation mode choices, making communities more walkable/bikeable/transit-friendly
- Reduces negative environmental impacts and stormwater runoff



DRAWBACKS

- Resistance from property and business owners based on perceived under-supply of parking
- Parking could theoretically be slightly more inconvenient on one or two days a year

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Base decisions on real, observed data on parking usage
- Discuss benefits and drawbacks with community and property owners
- Ensure balance of parking requirements reflects community goals as well as needs
- Consider conducting a neighborhood or corridor parking analysis



RESOURCES

Local Examples

- **City of Harrisburg Off-Street Parking and Loading**
- **Lower Paxton Township Towne Center District Parking Design Standards**
- **TCRPC "Rethinking Parking Requirements Using Drone Imagery" Presentation**

Supporting Documents

- **American Planning Association Parking Standards**
- **Strong Towns Parking Minimums: From 101 to Taking Action**
- **Sustainable Development Code Parking Maximum**

RELATED TOOLKIT FACT SHEETS

- **Form-Based Codes**
- **Transit-Oriented Development**